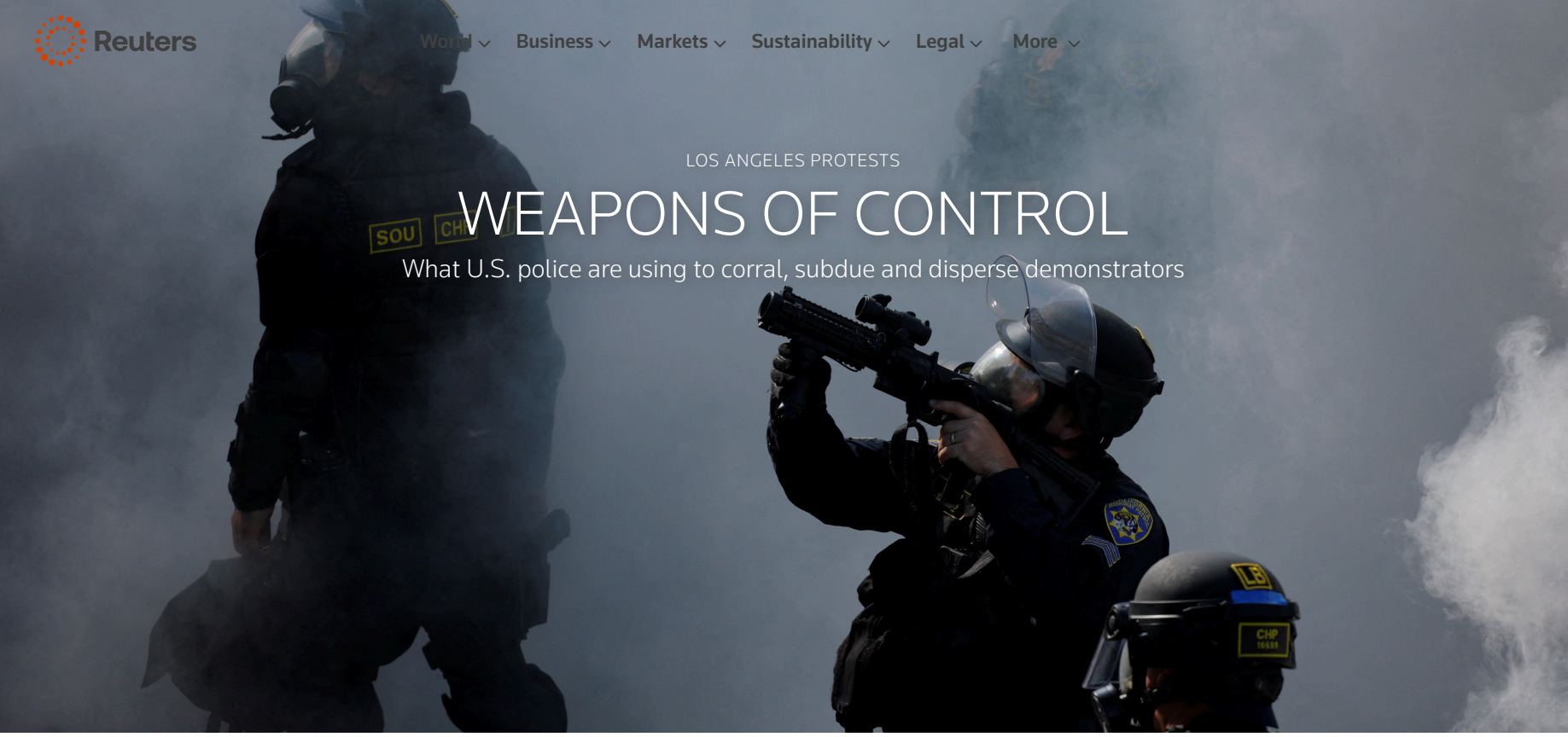


LOS ANGELES PROTESTS

WEAPONS OF CONTROL

What U.S. police are using to corral, subdue and disperse demonstrators

A police officer aims a weapon amid smoke during a protest against federal immigration sweeps in downtown Los Angeles, California, U.S. June 8, 2025. REUTERS/Mike Blake

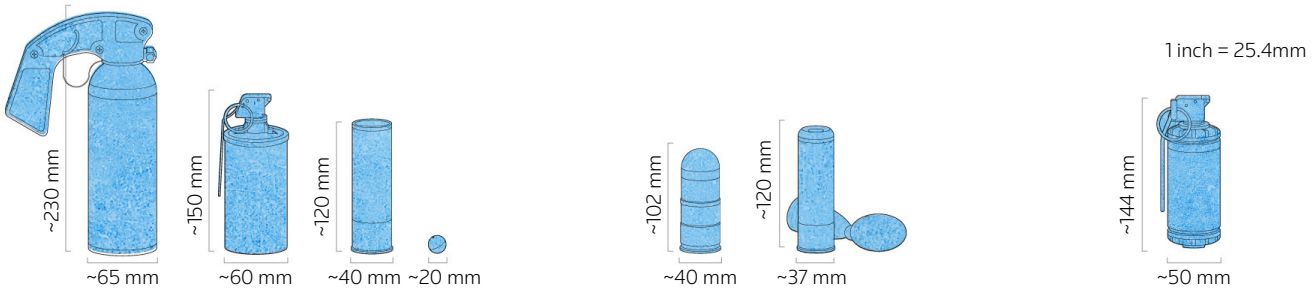
By **Jitesh Chowdhury** and **Tim Reid**
Published June 11, 2025 02:00 AM CDT

Law enforcement officials in Los Angeles began deploying "less lethal" munitions on June 8 as they clashed with crowds protesting federal immigration raids.

"Less lethal" or "less-than-lethal" weapons are designed to cause pain and discomfort, normally to disperse hostile crowds, but have caused serious injury and death in the past.

Here is a list of the less lethal weapons that have been deployed in Los Angeles in recent days, according to Reuters witnesses and the Los Angeles Police Department.

Anti-protest weapons



Chemical irritants
Pepper spray, tear gas canister, pepper canister and balls

Kinetic impact projectiles
Sponge rounds, beanbag rounds

Disorientation device
Flashbang grenade

Chemical irritants

Chemical irritants include tear gas and pepper spray, which cause sensations of burning, pain and inflammation of the airways.

Because chemical irritants can spread widely, bystanders and individuals other than the intended targets can be exposed to the chemicals.

Tear gas

Tear gas, one of the most common riot control tools, is designed to temporarily incapacitate people by causing excessive irritation to the eyes, nose, lungs and skin. It can cause temporary blindness, streaming eyes and noses, coughing, chest tightness, and difficulty breathing. Tear gas canisters usually contain CS gas, a chemical compound, or OC gas, which stands for oleoresin capsicum, the active ingredient in pepper spray.

Police officers stand amid tear gas during a protest against federal immigration sweeps in downtown Los Angeles, California, U.S. June 8, 2025. REUTERS/Daniel Cole

Pepper spray and balls

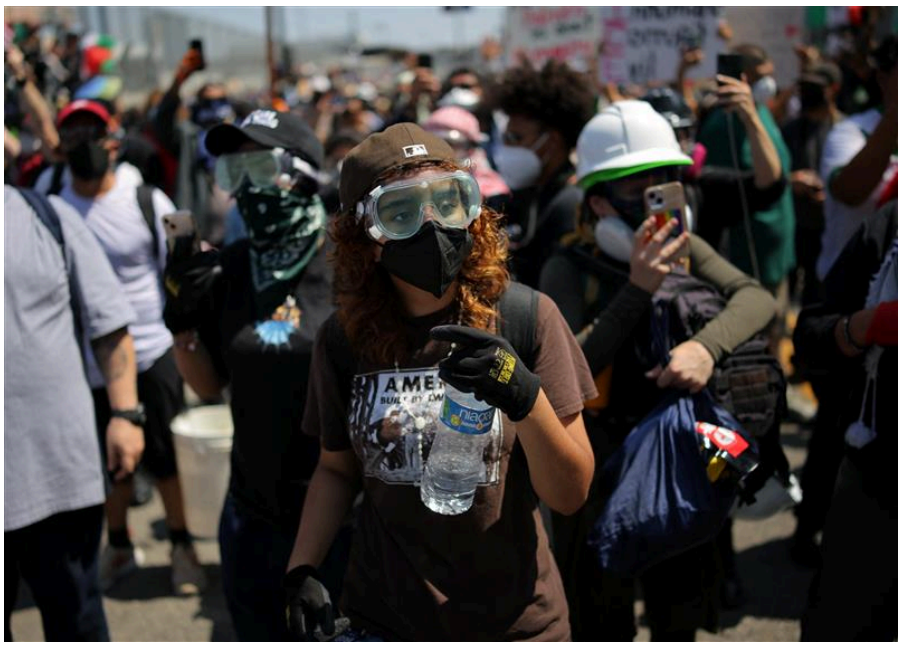
Pepper spray, which has similar impacts as tear gas, is sprayed from a handheld canister and often used when police come into close quarters with rioters or are engaged in hand-to-hand encounters. It mainly irritates the eyes, causing temporary blindness.

Pepper balls mirror the effects of pepper spray, but are delivered in a projectile similar to a paint ball. On impact, it bursts open, releasing powdered OC into the air. Police often do not fire pepper balls directly at a person, but at street signs, onto buildings or into the ground to cause them to burst open.

Members of law enforcement operate during a rally in solidarity with the Los Angeles protests against federal immigration sweeps, in Austin, Texas, U.S., June 9, 2025. REUTERS/Joel Angel Juarez

Protester defenses

Protesters have defended themselves against chemical irritants such as tear gas in multiple ways. Umbrellas have been used as shields during demonstrations and some were also seen wearing goggles and face masks.



A demonstrator uses an umbrella as law enforcement officers operate in downtown Los Angeles, California, U.S. June 9, 2025. REUTERS/David Swanson

A demonstrator wears goggles and a face mask during a protest in downtown Los Angeles, California, U.S. June 8, 2025. REUTERS/Daniel Cole

What police are shooting

Kinetic impact projectiles include a range of projectiles such as “sponger” bullets and beanbag rounds, which are shot from launchers and guns. They can severely bruise or penetrate the skin.

A police officer operates during a protest against federal immigration sweeps in downtown Los Angeles, California, U.S., June 8, 2025. REUTERS/David Ryder

A 2017 survey published by the British Medical Journal found that injuries from such kinetic impact projectiles caused death in 2.7% of cases.

Plastic and sponger bullets

Media outlets, and a reporter hit in the leg by a projectile on June 8, have said LAPD officers have been firing rubber bullets - a metal casing covered in rubber.

In fact, the LAPD does not use rubber bullets, the department told Reuters.

Instead, the LAPD uses foam rounds, a condensed sponge projectile that resembles a hard Nerf ball.

One version, which has a plastic body with a hard foam nose, is fired from a

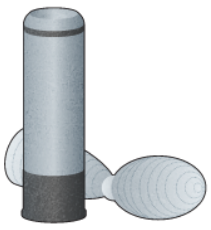
40mm launcher and is usually aimed directly at a target.

A second version, fired from a 37mm launcher, disperses five foam baton rounds toward the ground in front of a hostile crowd once an unlawful assembly has been declared, before bouncing up into the crowd. It is not to be fired directly at individuals, the LAPD said.

Both are designed to cause pain on impact without penetrating the skin. Police are forbidden from aiming sponge rounds at the head, neck, groin and spine.

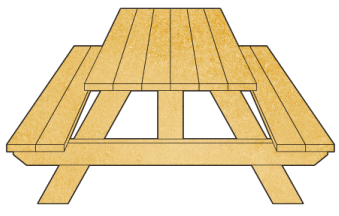
A member of the Los Angeles Metro Police fires a sponge round during a protest against federal immigration sweeps in downtown Los Angeles, California, U.S. June 8, 2025. REUTERS/Daniel Cole.

A law enforcement officer carries foam bullets, during a protest against federal immigration sweeps in downtown Los Angeles, California, U.S. June 9, 2025. REUTERS/David Swanson



Beanbag rounds

Bean bag rounds are normally 37mm cloth bags filled with 1.4 oz of lead or rubber pellets. They are fired from shotguns and spread out as they fly toward the intended target. They are designed not to penetrate the skin but to cause impact hard enough to render a target temporarily immobile.



Protester defenses

Protesters have worn helmets to protect themselves from projectiles. Some have used picnic tables as improvised shields.

Police clear demonstrators after they blocked a street with a barricade during a protest against federal immigration sweeps in downtown Los Angeles, California, U.S. June 8, 2025. REUTERS/David Ryder

Disorientation devices

Flash bangs, otherwise known as “distraction devices” or “noise flash diversionary devices,” produce an ear-piercing bang and bright light to disorient targets by temporarily disrupting their sight and hearing.

They are often used to target protesters who have become violent in a section of a crowd and also to allow police to enter a section of a crowd to extract offenders.

One type of flash bang device that has been used in Los Angeles has been the 40mm aerial flash bang. These are launched into the air and ignite above the heads of protesters.

A 40mm Flash Bang canister is seen on the ground in Los Angeles, California, U.S., June 9, 2025. REUTERS/Jill Connelly

Sources

Reuters, American Civil Liberties Union and Spencer Fomby, retired police captain and less lethal weapons instructor.

Illustrations by

Wen Foo and Ally J. Levine

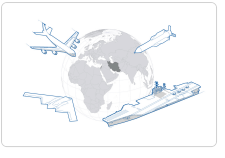
Edited by

Simon Scarr, Ross Colvin, Rod Nickel and Stephen Coates

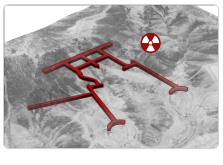
MORE FROM REUTERS GRAPHICS

Science
When the cycle stops: How period loss is often misdiagnosed and requires lifestyle changes
June 27, 2025

World
How US military power looms over the Israel-Iran conflict
June 20, 2025



World
Assessing the damage to Iran's nuclear programme
June 19, 2025



World
Maps and images of Israel’s strikes on Iran and Iran’s retaliation
June 17, 2025

Latest
Home

Browse
World

Media
Videos

About Reuters
About Reuters

Authors
Topic Sitemap
Archive
Article Sitemap

Business
Markets
Sustainability
Legal
Breakingviews
Technology
Investigations
Sports
Science
Lifestyle

Pictures
Graphics
Podcasts

Advertise with Us
Careers
Reuters News Agency
Brand Attribution Guidelines
Reuters and AI
Reuters Leadership
Reuters Fact Check
Reuters Diversity Report

Stay Informed

Download the App (iOS)
Download the App (Android)
Newsletters
Subscribe

Information you can trust

Reuters, the news and media division of Thomson Reuters, is the world's largest multimedia news provider, reaching billions of people worldwide every day. Reuters provides business, financial, national and international news to professionals via desktop terminals, the world's media organizations, industry events and directly to consumers.

Follow Us

Cookies Privacy Digital Accessibility Site Feedback

All quotes delayed a minimum of 15 minutes. See here for a complete list of exchanges and delays.

© 2025 Reuters. All rights reserved.